

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE**

**PRESENTATION TO THE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS AND MANAGEMENT,  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**SUBJECT: REAL PROPERTY MAINTENANCE AND ITS EFFECT ON READINESS.**

STATEMENT OF: BRIGADIER GENERAL EARNEST O. ROBBINS II  
THE CIVIL ENGINEER  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

26 October 1999

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, good afternoon, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Department of the Air Force's real property maintenance funding and the potential impact on readiness.

## **Overview**

Fifteen to twenty years ago the Air Force decided quality facilities were important to the Air Force mission. That wasn't a frivolous decision based on "we ought to look good," but an acknowledgement that by providing Air Force people with safe, efficient, and modern places to live and work we could directly impact readiness. In the mid-eighties and early nineties, our military construction and real property maintenance accounts were robust, and we made great progress in providing quality facilities. Since then, investment in Air Force facilities has declined as a result of constrained defense budgets and competing Air Force requirements, and we now see growth in the backlog of required work necessary to maintain the readiness edge we established in past years. Meanwhile, expectations of commanders and their people remain high, as they expect us to balance direct mission support and quality-of-life efforts in the face of aging infrastructure and declining military construction and real property maintenance budgets.

We share Mr. Yim's concern over the level of real property maintenance funding. We will work with him to develop a facility sustainment model which will allow us to better identify our facility and infrastructure requirements using current industry practices. We feel this will ultimately help us better communicate our facility requirements to our own policy and decision makers as well as to you here in Congress.

## **Quality-of-life Extension**

I'd like to start out by talking a little bit about the Air Force perspective regarding quality facilities and quality-of-life. In the mid-1980s, the Air Force perspective of "quality-of-life" was

extended beyond just family housing, dormitories, child development centers, and physical fitness facilities. In Tactical Air Command, in particular, it was recognized that quality-of-life extended into the workplace and had an important impact on readiness.

For instance, take an airman whose job is to maintain an F-15 engine and who's working in a hangar where the roof leaks. Every time it rains he's distracted from fixing the F-15 engine so he can move buckets around to catch the water. Is there a quality-of-life implication? I'd say there is.

For that same aircraft mechanic, let's say the first time his F-15 taxis out onto the ramp it ingests a piece of concrete from a deteriorating slab. That piece of concrete is ingested by the engine, and that perfect jet engine, which the mechanic spent so much time and effort on, now has to go back to the depot for a complete overhaul. Does that affect the mechanic's quality-of-life? I suggest it does.

As a third example, that same airman, the highly trained jet engine mechanic, joins with a couple hundred of his best friends every workday to do what we refer to as a "FOD walk." For an hour out of the workday, they all march down the ramp in a straight line, looking for random pieces of loose concrete and joint sealant. I suggest our airman sees that as a direct impact on quality-of-life, even though at the end of the workday he goes back to one of the best dormitories in the Department of Defense and enroute eats dinner in a wonderful dining facility. That demonstrates the extension of quality-of-life into the working environment, and I think we're losing the battle to maintain the high standards our people have come to expect and deserve.

So a challenge facing the Air Force civil engineering community today is to operate and maintain Air Force bases so the mission is fully supported and quality-of-life is what it should be, at a time when resources have gone downward. At the same time we are dealing with recruiting

and retention problems, high operational tempo, training shortfalls, and on and on and on. These pressures are beginning to have an impact on our overall readiness.

### **Under-funded Facility Programs**

As you well know, we manage our facilities and infrastructure through two major programs: First, the real property maintenance, or RPM, account within the Operation and Maintenance Appropriation, is intended to maintain the Air Force infrastructure already in place. Second, the military construction appropriation, which allows the Air Force to replace antiquated facilities and to beddown new weapons systems. In addition, we are committed to aggressively reduce infrastructure costs through consolidation, demolition, and privatization. Although the focus of today's hearing is on RPM, success in each of these areas is necessary to allow us to provide the quality facilities needed to support air and space operations. Although there are clearly several areas where we have achieved notable successes as a result of excellent congressional support for facility-related programs, continued constraints in RPM and military construction *is* beginning to show in degraded facilities and supporting infrastructure. The results are reduced productivity on the flightline, in maintenance shops, and in administrative facilities across the Air Force.

### **Real Property Maintenance**

In FY87, our annual real property maintenance investment, on average, was just over \$6 per square foot in FY00 dollars. That figure has fallen off to less than \$4 per square foot in FY00. This represents a 37% decrease.

In FY00, RPM is funded at what we call the Preventive Maintenance Level intended to accomplish *only* the day-to-day maintenance required to sustain real property facilities and infrastructure. It does not provide the resources necessary to accomplish needed repair and minor

construction. As a result, our total force backlog of critical repair and minor construction has grown to \$4.4B.

The Air Force defines Preventive Maintenance Level, or PML, as one percent of the Air Force's Plant Replacement Value. And although the Air Force continues to operate, we are increasingly required to develop "work-arounds," which impact Air Force operational efficiency. Examples include deteriorated airfield pavements requiring longer aircraft taxi routes, increased engine run time, and increased foreign object damage risk to aircraft engines. One specific example is a B-1 aircraft avionics shop at Dyess AFB, which lacks the power and air conditioning required to permit work on offensive and defensive electronic systems. As a result, many "black boxes" now have to be sent out for contracted repair, which is more expensive than repairing the parts with organic Air Force capability.

As mentioned previously, the current level of RPM funding defers most non-PML facility projects, resulting in a FY00 backlog of critical repair and minor construction totaling \$4.4B. We have developed a RPM metric we call the Facility Investment Metric, or FIM, to identify requirements above and beyond the day to day maintenance level. The FIM stratifies repair and minor construction requirements based on mission impact and allows us to identify and track our current backlog. We are putting our commanders in a difficult position because current budgets contain very limited funding to do this work. Therefore, commanders can either fund PML requirements and defer backlogged repairs and minor construction, or they can divert maintenance dollars to address critical repairs and minor construction at the expense of performing PML. Therefore, RPM funding at *only* the Preventive Maintenance Level will not prevent our \$4.4B total backlog from growing.

This scenario is projected to continue until FY03, when RPM program funding begins to gradually increase. Funding is currently projected to grow from one percent of the plant replacement value to just over 1.4% by FY05. This means our backlog will not disappear overnight and Air Force operations and readiness will continue to show increasingly adverse effects. However, the Air Force must limit RPM funding at the Preventive Maintenance Level so we can fund higher priority programs, within our total obligation authority cap.

There *is* good news within this story. The Air Force *has* benefited over the past four years from congressional adds to the RPM account for quality-of-life Enhancements. This effort allowed the Air Force to greatly improve conditions in our dormitories and other traditional quality-of-life facilities, and we deeply appreciate your support in this high-visibility and high-impact area.

### **Infrastructure Reduction**

On a more positive note, consolidation, demolition, and privatization continue to help us leverage limited RPM and military construction dollars.

As we drew down in the early 1990's, each installation endeavored to consolidate functions into the smallest foot print possible. From FY96 to FY99 we demolished 11 million square feet of building space. This is equivalent to three Air Force bases, with the total square footage of Langley, Altus, and Vance AFBs, combined. FY00 to FY03 demolition projections will allow us to eliminate another 10 million square feet. Even though demolition costs have gone up, demolition is ultimately cheaper than the cost of trying to continue to operate and maintain these facilities.

Privatization is another means of reducing the Air Force infrastructure foot print. We have moved ahead with pilot housing privatization projects, including award of DoD's first project

utilizing the 1996 Defense Authorization Act authorities in August 1998 at Lackland AFB. This project calls for a developer, as the owner, to design, construct, maintain, own and manage a housing development of 420 units on leased government land for rental to active duty families. We also have nine other projects in various stages of development, allowing us to take a measured approach to this program and help reduce the housing revitalization backlog in a more timely manner.

We also continue to move ahead with privatizing utility systems -- water, wastewater, electrical, and natural gas -- with two criteria: where it is economically beneficial and does not adversely impact our mission readiness. We have 441 systems identified as candidates for utilities privatization. To date, 74 studies have returned with "Go" decisions for the Phase 1 - Feasibility Analysis, having satisfied the initial economic and readiness criteria. These systems are now entering the Phase 2, Comprehensive Evaluation. We have 214 systems under study now for potential privatization and have programmed the analysis of the remaining 153 systems in FY00.

## **Conclusion**

Secretary Peters remarked at the AFA Air Warfare Symposium on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February, 1999: "Because the budget is constrained, we took a risk where we thought we could afford to do so, specifically in the area of infrastructure, which fell below the cut line on our prioritized list." We obviously understand and support this position. As engineers it is our responsibility to provide policy makers and decision makers with informed assessments of requirements along with our best judgements regarding impacts on readiness and quality-of-life. We'll continue to capitalize on the limited resources at our disposal and, just as importantly, on the ingenuity and dedication of our officers, enlisted personnel, civilians, and contractors, to operate and maintain

our bases to the best of our ability.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the committee for its strong support of Air Force programs and the benefits they have provided the Air Force in terms of readiness, retention, recruiting and the quality performance of our people. I will be happy to address any questions.